



**A Journey toward Assessment Literacy:
Empowering Teachers to Make the Best Instructional Decisions**

By: Rebecca Woosley, Effectiveness Coach

As districts across the state engage in the process of analyzing newly-released assessment data, I sat down with Dr. Michele Reynolds, Jessamine County's Chief Academic Officer (CAO), to learn about the process they use to approach this task. This district, led by Superintendent Kathy Fields, has a clear vision and a genuine commitment to excellence that goes beyond annual data analysis.

To begin the conversation and provide context, Dr. Reynolds explained how, in the past, the district approached data analysis of state test scores the same way as many others across the state. Although this data is important to review, Jessamine County leaders began to realize that over-analysis of this data was not producing the instructional changes needed to achieve the student outcomes they desired.

Reynolds carefully articulates that their district is in the very early stages of a journey they believe will transform instruction and lead to student success. She explained that, as a result of intensive work building teachers' and leaders' understanding of formative assessment during the past year, it became increasingly apparent that they needed a sustainable, systemic approach to effect changes that could make a difference for students.

Already on the path to that systemic approach to assessment literacy, Jessamine County laid the foundation by committing time and both district and grant funds, to develop the capacity of a large number of teacher leaders in every school in the district last year and again this year. In addition, district leaders now work monthly with principals and school leaders, and then with teacher leaders, to build their collective capacity. Supporting that shared leadership structure, they intentionally allocate time during those sessions so teachers and school leaders can plan how to build the capacity of every district teacher through professional learning communities (PLCs).

This year the district is using a new lens to look at the work – one that includes an assessment protocol as a part of their intentional transformation process. Beginning the process by honing in on non-negotiables by grade level, course and class, they ask themselves a two-part question:

*What assessments do we administer/require across schools?
and
What is the purpose of each?*

While acknowledging that some of those assessments provide convenient reports, these questions framed their next considerations:

*What are we trying to find out about our students?
and
Does the assessment match the criteria for success?*

Reynolds indicates district leaders also recognize the need to consider which data give them the best insights into instructional effectiveness across the district. So, looking at the schools and teachers using specific programs, some of these questions surface:

How quickly is growth happening for students compared to their peers?

What can we learn by looking at the [conditional growth index](#) in MAP?

When we analyze the effect and impact of specific RTI programs in place in different locations, what is working and where?

How do we know?

One simple answer to their questions surfaced: **streamline the assessments and the intentional use of assessment results across the district.**

With the support of KDE, the district plans another intentional part of their instructional transformation process in late winter – a focus on novice reduction work. Reynolds indicated that this past spring a few proactive schools in the district began [novice reduction work](#) when they received their 2016 report. The effect? Those schools saw dramatic results. Now, the district plans to use novice reduction processes to guide assessment practices in Jessamine County schools.

Novice reduction takes them back to the question at the beginning – *What data do we really need?* Because of the intentional focus on formative assessment last year, they have evidence to support the answer to that question. They plan to move toward a more flexible, fluid, relevant implementation of formative assessments and sorting protocols and away from staged, sometimes ill-timed, *stop and drop* assessments, like learning checks.

Reynolds shared that their formative assessment work last year also led them to recognize the need for a systemic approach to PLCs. They know Dufour's research validates the critical impact of fully functional, self-sustaining PLCs. One of the key roles of those PLCs is leading a strategic school-based process of identifying core purposes, setting goals, and establishing 30-60-90 day plans relying on measureable data that informs instruction.

At this point in the conversation, Reynolds reiterated that this vision for PLCs will inform the Jessamine County School District's journey. They foresee the work and learning that lies ahead for every teacher and leader in the district. Moving forward, the process begun in late August of engaging the identified teacher leaders from all their schools in professional learning (a systems approach to PLCs) will continue. Despite the challenge of this work, teachers and leaders feel supported and valued as they collaborate with district leaders. They all work together to forge a clear pathway based on their shared vision for student success.

Dr. Reynolds sums it up this way, "The bottom line for us – assessment literacy isn't about stopping to test. For us, it's about developing the capacity of schools and teachers to make constant adjustments based on the most informative, real-time data." She adds, "By keeping the process simple, it's also about empowering teachers to make the best instructional decisions every day in their classrooms."

Jessamine County is one of 16 Kentucky districts engaged in KDE's [Instructional Transformation Project](#), supported by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. For more information about Jessamine County's assessment literacy journey, [assessment literacy resources for principals](#), or the [Instructional Transformation Project](#), contact [Dr. Michele Reynolds](#), Jessamine County Chief Academic Officer, or [Becky Woosley](#), KDE Effectiveness Coach.
